

✓ APPENDIX,

CONTAINING

FURTHER REMARKS ON THE SURGICAL DEPARTMENT OF HOSPITALS.

BY

BENJAMIN BELL.

SOON after my Letter to the College of Surgeons on this subject was published, one of the Managers of the Royal Infirmary, for whom I entertain a high regard, expressed a desire to have my opinion on some parts of it more at large; and the request having been repeated by another, I shall endeavour to satisfy them both, as well as the other Gentlemen in the management of the Hospital; and I do it the more readily, as I am now enabled to give them information which I think will deserve and meet with their attention.

Anxious that the surgical department of the Royal Infirmary should be so regulated, that the purposes of the Charity, and the improvement of Surgery might be best promoted; foreseeing that the contrariety of opinions that seemed to prevail upon the subject here, might make it difficult for the Managers to come to a decision, or that it might lead them to adopt measures not sufficiently efficacious; I determined to apply for information on the present state and most approved plan of surgical attendance in other Hospitals which have been long established, and in which there has been ample
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experience of the effects of it, as well as of every part of the system with which it is connected.

Information from Surgeons, whether employed in Hospitals or not, might be deemed partial : I therefore resolved to apply to Physicians in full employment, with no particular interest in the present question, and of that respectability of character which could not fail to give weight to their opinions. In this view, the following queries were addressed to SIR WALTER FARQUHAR and Dr SANDERS of London, Dr PERCIVAL of Manchester, Dr CURRIE of Liverpool, and Dr RAMSAY of Newcastle :

1. Are the Surgeons in your Hospitals elected, or have all the Surgeons in the place a right to attend, and in what numbers, at the same time ?

2. Are they on permanent appointments, that is, during life and good behaviour ; or do they attend on short appointments, and for what length of time at once ?

3. Was their mode of attendance ever different from what it now is ; and if alterations have taken place, what were the causes ?

4. Whatever the mode of attendance is, has it given satisfaction to those chiefly concerned in it ; to the patients in the first instance ; to the Managers or Governors ; and to the community ; by tending to improve the state of surgery ; and secure the regular attendance and care of the Surgeons ?

From all of these gentlemen I have received answers, approving, in strong and unequivocal terms, of the permanent appointment of Surgeons to Hospitals, as promoting the best interests of the patients, and of the public, wherever it has been adopted ; conducive to the improvement of surgery ; and not productive of any of the evils which many have dreaded who judge without sufficient experience.

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Sir WALTER FARQUHAR's observations are: "Surgeons to the London Hospitals are in some instances chosen from those who have been pupils; in others, from such as have served apprenticeships of seven years to the Surgeons in attendance; but all of them are elected by the Governors. Their appointments are in all instances permanent; but on their advancing in years they are allowed assistants, who, on their death, are commonly elected Surgeons.

"This mode of election has been long continued; and the attendance which the Surgeons give, affords full satisfaction to the patients, the Governors, and the community: For although their appointments are meant to be permanent, were well-founded complaints to be lodged against any individual, for neglect or misconduct, he would either immediately resign, or be dismissed by the Governors.

"Besides this, their character with the public, on which their employment depends, is a powerful motive for an accurate discharge of their duty, and while a great proportion of pupils of Hospitals resort to the best Surgeons, those who have not acquired reputation, get few or none."

The effect of permanent appointments, in promoting the progress of surgery, and in forming expert operators, appears to Sir WALTER FARQUHAR to have been very considerable; of which the most evident proof, he observes, that can be given, is, the great number of very eminent Surgeons, which the London Hospitals have produced, both at present, and in times that are past.

Dr SANDERS also writes with much interest and zeal; and, having acted as Physician to a large Hospital in London, for a great number of years, none can be better able to judge of the questions that were referred to him. Every part of his letter tends to establish, that the permanent appointment of Surgeons has long prevailed in all the Hospitals of London,
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and that it continues to be approved of; but as no part of the information which the letter from Dr SANDERS contains, is different from that which I have mentioned from Sir WALTER FARQUHAR, it is not necessary to give any farther detail of it.

Dr PERCIVAL's account bears, That the Surgeons of the Manchester Infirmary were three in number till the year 1790, when other three were added; that they are elected; on permanent appointments; and that no others have a right to attend, although some of the other Surgeons of the place are frequently invited, from motives of civility and friendship, to be present at extraordinary operations.

Every Surgeon has his own patients, whom he regularly takes charge of, as long as they remain in the Hospital.

No alteration has ever taken place in this mode of attendance, which at all times has given entire satisfaction. Attendance, in rotation, Dr PERCIVAL supposes to be peculiar to the Infirmary of Edinburgh; and it is generally, he says, believed to be injurious to the patients, and unfavourable to the acquisition of chirurgical dexterity and skill.

The following ample communication is contained in a letter from Dr CURRIE:

“ The Surgeons of our Infirmary, three in number, are elected by the Governors, and their appointments continue during life and good behaviour.

“ The Infirmary here was established in 1748, when the Surgeons elected were those most distinguished for their abilities and reputation. On their deaths or retirement which happened from 1765 to 1770, three of their pupils were elected in their stead: Two of these have withdrawn lately, and are replaced by two of their pupils: The third still continues.

“ This mode of attendance has given great satisfaction: The surgery of the Liverpool Infirmary has, in my opinion, been

been singularly well conducted; and the merit of our Surgeons is so well known to the world at large, that to point them out to you would be useless and idle. It will also occur to you, that when the whole practice of the Hospital was confined to three persons, it must have afforded them the means of acquiring not merely the knowledge of surgical diseases, but dexterity in operations in a superior degree. If I do not deceive myself, this has been remarkably the case in regard to our Surgeons, who, from their establishment in the Hospital, have engaged the principal part of the general practice of surgery here for a period exceeding thirty years. They were all elected Surgeons under twenty-five years of age; and this circumstance, with their great attention, having prevented the Hospital from having a succession of young Surgeons, it has been talked of among the Faculty of the Infirmary, that each of the Surgeons should have an Assistant, who should perform the duties of the office when the Surgeon was absent, and be entitled to succeed him on his resignation. This is the only change that occurs to me as an improvement.

“ Some attempts have been made to alter the attendance at our Infirmary, but they did not prove successful. At the Dispensary, however, the number of Physicians was some years ago made indefinite; and all the newly settled Physicians, four or five in number, were added to the original three: The consequence proved the measure to be a bad one, and the number is again put under limitation.

“ Not being a party concerned, I argued against the enlargement of the number, by saying to the Governors,

“ 1. That they ought to disregard the feelings of the Faculty when put in competition with the good of the patients.

“ 2. That they should elect as many Physicians and Surgeons as were necessary to do the business in the best manner,

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ner, and not one more; because as numbers are increased unnecessarily, the chance of disunion, a great evil to such institutions, is increased; because responsibility is in the same ratio diminished; because the reward arising from distinction and superior means of skill, is destroyed, without any other being substituted; and without reward of some kind, the members of our profession cannot be expected to discharge with zeal, for a course of years, duties of great toil of body, and anxiety of mind.

"In Liverpool these axioms, (such I consider them), are not likely to be disregarded in future. Experience has enlightened us; yet, after all, I doubt whether our system of professional attendance is the best in the nature of things, supposing these maxims to be just. Perhaps a plan somewhat rotatory, though limited, such as is said to be established at Glasgow, may be superior. Men do become less attentive when deeply engaged in general practice, when toil increases as strength decays. I must, however, own, that on the mode of attendance which has been adopted at Glasgow, I am not competent to give an opinion, as it is yet too recently established to admit of our speaking from experience concerning its effects; but be this as it may, there can be no question of the system of attendance in your Hospital giving offence to every principle on which reflecting men would expect to procure the best exertions of those whom they employ. I doubt whether a worse could be proposed. On this point, Dr GREGORY, whose memorial I have read, is altogether irresistible. Nothing, indeed, can be devised, that can fairly answer a tenth part of his reasoning.

I cannot calmly think of what I have often seen of your system of attendance. How many poor patients have been injured by it! Twenty-two years ago, when I was attending your Hospital, the day on which the attending Surgeon went
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off at the end of his two months, now in his grave,
ordered the whole of the dressings of every patient to be
changed in an instant, with every mark of contempt. The
impression sunk so deep, that I shall never lose it.

"If, indeed, there were no other motives for selection in the attendants on hospitals, the moral qualities requisite in medical practitioners would be sufficient. What mischief may not be done by a wild theorist, acting under the impulse of vanity and self-conceit, in concert, as they generally are, with a capricious temper and unfeeling heart; where his conduct is uncontrolled, where life is at stake, and poverty and sickness the unresisting objects: yet people of this kind must be admitted into Colleges and Corporations, as appeared clearly to have been the case in the instance to which I refer.

I have probably tired you in repeating what has been so much better said by Dr GREGORY: yet a Physician residing at a distance, and for nearly twenty years engaged in hospital-practice; one also who has witnessed the system that has long prevailed in yours, and has compared it with others; may be competent to offer an opinion on this interesting subject."

Dr RAMSAY writes as follows:

"The Surgeons to the Newcastle Infirmary, four in number, are elected by the Governors, and retain their appointment for life, subject to dismissal for misconduct alone.

"No other Surgeons have any right, even if they happen to be Governors, to visit patients; nor can they be present at any operations, except by special invitation.

"For several years after the establishment of this Infirmary, two Surgeons were sufficient; but the increase of collieries, and manufactories, having added to the number of surgical cases, the number of Surgeons was increased to four.

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" This plan has been attended with every benefit that could be desired: the services of able and experienced operators have been secured, and the prospect of succeeding to this honourable appointment has been favourable to professional emulation among the junior Surgeons of the town. None of the consequences, which, in speculation, have been supposed to arise from restricted numbers, and appointments for life, have taken place. The Surgeons are zealous to support the reputation of the house; and, though there are few Hospitals where cases of severe accidents oftener occur, yet we have had no instances of delay of operations from the difficulty of procuring a Surgeon of the establishment. We have had, indeed, a very striking illustration of the mischief of an unlimited number of Physicians in the conducting of an otherwise excellent institution here, the Dispensary. The Governors thinking to extend its usefulness, accepted the services of every Physician who settled in this place; but it was found, that the facility of access to the office, by destroying its consequence, led to complete neglect of duty. In your Hospital, I well know, that the pupils have always been struck with the indiscriminate admission of Surgeons. By the pupils the Infirmary has been considered as a branch of the University; and the necessity in that view of providing able instructors in surgery, has appeared to be equally great as in the appointment of men of eminence as Professors."

The whole train of this evidence is singularly strong. Opinions of men of sound judgment, great professional knowledge, and high reputation, given separately, and without concert, and all agreeing on every point, are so conclusive, that they neither require nor admit of illustration. They remove all shadow of doubt, with those who are open to conviction from facts and experience, of the superiority of permanent appointments of Surgeons to Hospitals.

I have only further to add a few observations, in compliance with the request which I have mentioned.

1. Whatever the mode of attendance for the Surgeons of our Infirmary shall be, no greater number should be chosen than is necessary for the Hospital duty: More would unquestionably do harm.

2. Four Surgeons, that is, two ordinary or acting Surgeons, and two Assistants, might be sufficient for a greater number of patients than are at any time admitted to our Infirmary; but this advantage would be derived from the appointment of four senior Surgeons and two Assistants, that in the absence of the acting Surgeons, no important part of the business would devolve on the Assistants.

3. All the surgical business of the Hospital should be conducted by the two acting Surgeons, during the whole course of their appointment; nor should the other two senior Surgeons be desired to attend, but for the purpose of taking charge of it, when the others are from necessity absent; or at operations, or such cases of consultation as are singular and important.

4. With the further view of preventing misunderstanding and disagreement, each of the two acting Surgeons should attend his own patients only, and never visit those of the other but when desired; nor should any other Surgeon in town, not even Surgeons acting as Managers, be allowed to visit the patients of either of the Surgeons, without their concurrence. Neither should strangers be ever allowed to attend at consultations.

5. The junior Surgeons, whether attending for periods of long or short duration, should not only take charge of all dissections, of which they ought to keep an accurate account, but should daily examine and correct the written statement of cases taken by the clerk on the preceding day,

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which once every week should be inserted in a ledger, to be kept as a record.

The junior Surgeon in attendance, ought also to see that the instruments for operations are kept in order, and that a sufficient supply of bandages, and other parts of the surgical apparatus, is always in readiness; by which the whole business of the department would be conducted with ease to the acting Surgeon, which could not otherwise be the case.

6. One or both of the acting Surgeons should be permitted to give Clinical Lectures on the cases of the patients; or, in the event of their declining this privilege, it should be allowed to one or both of the other senior Surgeons, who, in giving lectures on the cases, would be obliged to attend daily, although with no liberty to prescribe or give directions. It might even be proper to admit of this privilege to the junior Surgeons, if all the others should refuse it; but at no period, or in no circumstances, should Clinical Lectures be given by more than two Surgeons in one year.

7. Much benefit may be derived from accurate attention to the admission of patients: with which view, the business of the waiting-room should be managed alternately by the two acting Surgeons; each to attend, one, two, or three months at once, as may be agreed on; all that are admitted on each day to be equally divided between both Surgeons; and in cases of doubt, a consultation to be immediately held with the other acting or ordinary Surgeon, and the Assistant, so that none shall ever be admitted, which are not evidently proper for Hospital-practice.

8. It would add greatly to the ease of doing Hospital business, were the whole of it put over in the morning: The time of attendance might be either seven or eight, from the beginning of March till the end of September, and nine o'clock during

ring the rest of the year ; by which, an hour would be gained daily, by the duty of the Hospital being finished before the ordinary time of paying visits to private families ; while no time would be lost, as daily happens at present, when, in the most busy period of the day, both the Physicians and Surgeons are obliged to leave those parts of the town in which they are at twelve o'clock, perhaps to return to them again on their attendance at the Hospital being finished.

9. Although every Member of the College of Surgeons would be willing to do the duty of the Infirmary without fee or reward, if the funds of the Institution did not admit of their being paid, I am induced to believe that it would be both for the credit and interest of the Hospital, that a moderate allowance should be made to them ; to the extent, perhaps, of fifty pounds yearly to each of the ordinary or acting Surgeons, and of half that amount to the Assistants.

The Surgeons giving Clinical Lectures should likewise be allowed to take fees from their pupils ; but as the duties of the other two senior Surgeons not in charge of the business, would be inconsiderable, no pecuniary allowance to them would be necessary from the funds of the Hospital.

These payments to the ordinary and assistant Surgeons, would be in a great measure, if not entirely, compensated by that minute attention which three Surgeons in daily attendance would be enabled to give to every part of the business, which it is not in the power of a single person to do ; a considerable part of it might be raised by the Dressers being made to pay more than other Pupils, as is done in all the Hospitals of London ; Clinical Lectures undoubtedly add to the number of Pupils attending the Hospital ; and if all of these modes of raising it should prove deficient, more than the whole sum might be easily obtained from the Public.